Which Is Worse: Postmodernism or Anti-Intellectualism?

By Alex Berezow — March 23, 2017

Every discussion about postmodernism quickly devolves into accusations that the writer doesn’t know what postmodernism is. Of course, that's true, because nobody knows what postmodernism is. Even the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy agrees. As the ultimate manifestation of intellectual and cultural relativism, postmodernism means whatever its adherents want it to mean.

Yet, this nebulous concept poses an existential threat to science and technology. How so? Because postmodernism is largely characterized by a rejection of objective truth. This is antithetical to scientific inquiry.

Marcel Kuntz, Director of Research at CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), has made it part of his life's work to fight against the corrosive effects of postmodernism. He's back again in the pages of Trends in Biotechnology. He perceptively writes:

Postmodernism is a product of the romanticist rejection of reason and of the 'Western guilt' regarding tragedies such as slavery, colonialism, the Holocaust, and so on, many of which are viewed as consequences of Enlightenment 'imperialistic' thought. A typical expression of this guilt is to display one's repentance regarding these historical events (even if one is not personally responsible for them) with political correctness being one of its social coercive tools.
Postmodernism, therefore, explains all types of behavior on university campuses, from the widespread suppression of free speech and strange obsession with cultural appropriation to the creation of "safe spaces" and the feminist rejection of science as a sexist, patriarchal construct. Without a doubt, postmodernism is a wolf in sheep's clothing, a fundamentally anti-intellectual ideology that masquerades as erudite philosophy.

The March for Science

Postmodernism also explains the "March for Science." Contrary to their claim that the march is about promoting evidence-based policies, the organizers are pushing a thinly veiled postmodernist agenda. That's why they have partnered with groups that endorse vehemently anti-science positions, such as Center for Biological Diversity, Union of Concerned Scientists, and Center for Science in the Public Interest.

It also makes sense of tweets like the one shown above. Francis Bacon likely would be surprised to learn that a movement claiming the mantle of science is primarily preoccupied with politics, diversity, and harassment. As a general rule, those aren't considered pillars of the scientific method.

The "Democratization of Science"

Such buffoonery is perhaps the inevitable result of "democratizing" science. True, science should be taught to all people, but it is absurd to believe that the average person has something useful to say about it. Yet, that's precisely what the organizers of the March for Science believe. Their website says:

> If scientists hope to discuss their work with the public, they must also listen to the
public’s thoughts and opinions on science and research. Progress can only be made by mutual respect.

No, no, no. That is pure, unadulterated postmodernist drivel. Scientific progress is not made by holding hands and singing Kumbaya with the local yoga instructor. Instead, it is made when scientists are allowed to investigate tough questions by rigorously applying the scientific method. From this discipline springs revolutionary technologies that change the world. While public outreach by scientists is important, asking for public input is often a complete waste of time.

Actually, it can be worse. Dr. Kuntz explains:

People willing to 'engage' usually have a political agenda: they are often activists, relabeled as 'stakeholders,' who view technology as a problem rather than as a possible solution.

Unfortunately, fostering mutual respect while singing campfire songs won't change their minds.

Postmodernism vs. Anti-Intellectualism

Last year, we published an article that claimed anti-intellectualism is the biggest threat to modern society. This article, as well as Dr. Kuntz, would seem to argue that postmodernism is the actual threat.

So, which is worse: Postmodernism or Anti-Intellectualism? Trick question! They're the same thing.

Notes

(1) For proof, read the comments section in the article, "Scientists Should Fight Postmodern Public Values."

(2) The very first sentence of its entry on postmodernism reads, "That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism."


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